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**DELEGATION REPORT**
**Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia**

Query: **Speaker = Gibson* and East Timor**

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Speech in the context of Miscellaneous

Speaker: Gibson Mr G.D.

Electorate: MORETON
Party: ALP
Government: YES

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# DELEGATION REPORT
## Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia

**Mr GIBSON** (Moreton)--by leave--I welcome the opportunity in the short time we have available to us today to make a few comments on this report. Firstly, I would also like to place on record my appreciation to the very many people who helped us during our visit. First and foremost, our delegation secretary, John Dyer, deserves great mention. He was a very diligent worker and I certainly appreciated his hard work, tolerance, strong friendship, and the level of experience that he provided to the new members of Parliament going on their first trip.

I would also like to thank most sincerely for their hospitality the Government and the people of Hong Kong and express appreciation for the great cooperation that we received from the Australian Consulate staff, particularly Geoff Bentley, the Consul-General, and Grant Batteersby, the Deputy Consul-General. Also, my thanks go to the Government and the people of Singapore for their delightful hospitality, and to the staff of the Australian High Commission, in particular, Alan Brown and Les Luck. They had very little notice of our intention to visit Singapore, yet still managed to organise an excellent program for us while we were there.

As the right honourable member for New England (Mr Sinclair) has indicated, all members of the delegation were disappointed at not being able to attend the IPU conference that was held in Thailand or to participate in a parliamentary visit to Pakistan, owing to the security concerns that existed at the time in relation to the Gulf war.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Parliament and Government of the Republic of Indonesia for their comprehensive program, their thorough organisation of all parts of our itinerary during our visit to their country, and their hospitality and generosity. My further thanks go to Phillip Flood, the Australian Ambassador and his staff, particularly Mrs Judith Pead and Dr Mark Napier, for their advice, support and companionship on the trip.

The report being tabled covers in detail the extensive range of meetings and discussions that members of the delegation had in our three host countries. All of us learnt a great deal about the current position on trade, economic development, regional security issues, immigration and the flow of illegal immigration from Vietnam, the education of students from these countries in Australian institutions, and Australia's profile and reputation in the region. We utilised numerous opportunities to advance our nation's position on many matters and to seek to identify ways in which we can improve our economic and trading links in these rapidly growing economies.

Our educational links with these nations, through the marketing of places in Australian tertiary and secondary institutions, are a large and growing component of our trade, as well as having valuable benefits in our social, cultural and educational relationships.

Senator Nick Sherry and I visited the Australian Education Offices in both Hong Kong and Singapore and also spoke about these important education links with representatives of all three governments. I refer honourable members to recommendations 4.1 to 4.4, which we believe will improve the structural processes involved with international students studying in Australia.

The visit of our delegation to Indonesia and, in particular, to East Timor has generated the most comment and interest among the media and the community. I wish to spend some time on this part of our trip, but I do wish to emphasise that the large body of information and recommendations on the other elements of our itinerary deserve full consideration and attention by both the Government and honourable members. My colleagues have highlighted many important elements of our trip in their contributions today.

Our visit to East Timor was part of an eight day visit to a number of locations in Indonesia. We also spent quite a deal of our time speaking with senior Indonesian Government Ministers, including the President, on the situation in East Timor as well as on other issues of importance to

Indonesian-Australian relations.

Our visit to East Timor was brief and limited in its opportunities for us to speak freely and frankly with East Timorese people, compared with our discussions with selected government and military officials. Therefore much of the feedback concerning the situation of the people of East Timor was learned second-hand.

Earlier this year, on 17 April, I outlined to the House the history of the conflict of East Timor and my disagreement with the Australian Government's position. In that speech I outlined my perceptions of the situation for the people in that territory of being oppressed, occupied and abused. I do not wish to repeat today all of my concerns as expressed in that speech. However, the perceptions I outlined then are confirmed by this report in our conclusions and recommendations.

During our time in Dili, the leader of the delegation, the Speaker, the Hon. Leo McLeay, was handed a letter from the leader of the resistance forces in East Timor, Xanana Gusmao, to be delivered to the Prime Minister of Australia (Mr Hawke). A rough translation of this letter was also given to some members of the delegation, and I seek leave to table a copy of this translation for the benefit of honourable members.

Leave granted.

**Mr GIBSON**--I thank the House. This letter is an appeal to the Prime Minister and the Australian Government to assist the East Timorese people to find a peaceful resolution to the continuing conflict. I quote from the letter:

We seek a peaceful political solution and call on the principal parties to the question--Indonesia, Portugal and legitimate representatives of East Timor--to meet with the United Nations to find this solution. The only way to find an immediate solution is through dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations.

This statement from Xanana Gusmao in his letter goes to the very essence of the minority recommendations of this report contained on page 140.

My colleagues the honourable member for Newcastle (Mr Allan Morris), Senator Nick Sherry and I have sought to find a positive way of restoring peace to the people of East Timor. When the Indonesians invaded the territory in 1975, they disrupted the legitimate process of self-determination that was under way. In the years since, they have deliberately embarked on a military campaign to destroy all vestiges of opposition to their takeover.

For 16 years the Indonesians have engaged in military action which has resulted in the death of over 100,000 people, destroyed villages and uprooted many thousands more, and they have continued a campaign of oppression. It is clear that the Indonesian authorities are facing a new generation of resistance in both the towns and villages as well as in the hills and countryside. Coverage of demonstrations that were held in 1989 and 1990 in Dili and elsewhere demonstrates this.

Reports from reliable sources during our visit, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International, confirm that abuses of human rights are still widely prevalent and that military offences are regular occurrences. The violence, torture and death in East Timor will not cease until a proper settlement occurs, and no amount of ostrich-type actions by either the Australian Government or some honourable members in this House can avoid this conclusion.

If Indonesia truly wishes to take a higher profile on the world stage--to be seen to be a new responsible power in Asia and the Third World--it must sit down and negotiate on the issue of East Timor. Australia has a responsibility to act to achieve this end. We must stand up for the principles of human rights and self-determination that are the foundation of our foreign policy in the rest of the world and apply them to our own backyard.

The minority report recommendations seek the United Nations to convene a conference of all interested parties to negotiate a future for East Timor. We also seek greater involvement of the Australian Government in achieving this goal. This recommendation is supported by the East Timorese people, as evidenced from the letter from Xanana Gusmao. It is supported by the East Timorese groups throughout Australia. It is the basis of a strong campaign being mounted by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid called `A Time for Talks'. I call on the Australian Government and, in particular, our Foreign Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, to utilise his

obvious skills of diplomacy, as demonstrated in the resolution of the Cambodian situation, in arriving at a just peace for the people of East Timor.

As I said on 17 April, and I reaffirm today, my strong disagreement with Indonesia's actions in East Timor and the Australian Government's appeasement attitude in response in no way diminishes my support for improving the economic, trade, social, cultural and educational links between our two nations. As is clear with most other nations--particularly Japan, the United States, Canada, Britain and all of Europe--increasing relationships with Indonesia are not conditional on acceptance of Indonesia's takeover of East Timor. None of these nations accept Indonesia's hegemony. They have been able to develop a mature relationship with Indonesia without prostituting their foreign policy principles. It is a time for Australia to do the same.

I commend both the full report of our delegation and the two minority recommendations to honourable members and the Government and urge their full consideration.